

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 263.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, JANUARY 13, 1894. PRICE TWOPENCE.

MARRIED TO ORDER.

A ROMANCE OF MODERN DAYS.

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CHAPTER II. A KING AND HIS COURT.

PHILIP GILLBANKS had so lately been in the full swing of a busy and monotonous University life, that now having chanced upon this adventure he had some difficulty in believing that he was really in his senses. The day's long tramp had wearied him, and the cold and chill he had experienced on the fell—though his late scramble had considerably restored his circulation—caused him to say to himself, half in fun, and half in earnest, that he must be dreaming. The shepherd's talk about a Palace, a King, and a Duke, was, of course, easily explainable, only he was unable to explain it; and at this moment the river far below the tiny path, though invisible through the darkness, added to the mystery, for it splashed and roared between its rocky banks. Moreover, the glen was well wooded, and the trees bending over the foaming stream hid from too curious eyes its struggles with its rocky foe. Philip followed in silence not because he believed in the King's murderous rifle, but because conversation was useless unless carried on at very close quarters, and he felt too weary to shout so as to make himself heard above the noise. Following closely the shepherd's heels—and this in itself was not easy, considering that the countryman was not at all spent, and that the townsman was nearly exhausted—Philip at last saw that his guide paused before a small wicket gate.

Opening it he took a path directly to his left, leaving the river to roar on its way alone, and soon after the two emerged on what Philip fancied must be a lawn, beyond which a large pile of building suddenly hid the grey sky. A few lights twinkled in various windows, but they appeared only to add to the mysterious silence of the place. This silence was, however, soon broken when the shepherd, turning again to the left, entered a back courtyard. A furious barking of dogs and rattling of chains made Philip truly thankful that he was not alone, and still more puzzled as to the reason why this inn should look like a private mansion, and why the landlord kept so many dogs to guard it.

Suddenly he realised that this could be no common public-house, for the shepherd, leaving him in near companionship with the furious dogs, dived into a well-lighted kitchen, where he was soon surrounded by several servants, who, though not possessing the spick-and-span air of modern domestics, were certainly not the menials of a poor innkeeper. After some gesticulating and much talk, his friend returned to his side.

"The King's at heam, and Betty is gone to talk to the Princess, for the Queen's a-bed. She niver wad stop oop: ta t' bargain between the leddy and the King. Sometimes they differt and frach't, but no fowling on course."

What all this might mean Philip did not know in the least, and by this time he did not much care. The warm glow from the kitchen fire, and the smell of savoury masher, was more than his starving temper could stand.

"I don't know who all these people are, but surely this good woman will let me

dry myself a little, and give me some supper, and then I'll walk on to Meretown, if hospitality is not to be had at—this—farm."

"It's noah time o' neit ta loose yaw temper," said Jim Oldcorn, grinning broadly. "Yaw wad be a gay bit better i' bed and with victuals inside o' you, but if the King war to set his face agin it, wall, ye see, your condition wad be for getting warse and warse. Patience a bit, sir, for Betty's a neat lass and handy with haw tongue, and no doubt the Princess will tak' pity on you."

"Take pity! I can pay my night's lodging," said Philip shortly; but happily for his temper Betty reappeared. If she was unusually handy with her tongue she failed on this occasion, for she merely beckoned to the stranger to follow her. Philip turned to the shepherd and slipped a crown into his palm as he wished him "good night." Jim Oldcorn, however, answered with a grin on his face:

"No need, no need, sir, and I fancy you'll be here for a la bit langer; we'll meet again."

Philip sincerely hoped that he might not again require the swain's services, but repeating his thanks, he followed Betty through dark passages, till at last they emerged into a large, oak-panelled hall, very dimly lighted by one oil lamp.

Here Betty paused and looked at Philip's dripping condition.

"The Princess had better come and see you here, sir," she whispered.

Again Philip inwardly cursed the strange etiquette of these wild glen people, who could not allow a poor benighted traveller to come in and dry himself without so much ceremony and so many nicknames. Was he in an enchanted valley? Had he suddenly jumped back into a past age, or was he at some place more strange than respectable, which would turn out to be some den of iniquity, where robbery, and perhaps murder, were not unknown? The shepherd's talk gave likelihood to the idea.

No, the supposition was ridiculous, and Philip was about to make another impatient remark, when a roar of laughter rang through the hall, followed by a hurried sound of footsteps. Betty was visibly affected.

"It's the King," she murmured, "he's coming out, and I thought he was drinking for the rest of the night. Lor-a-mercy!"

"Hang it all," said Philip, "who is the villain they call the King?"

Suddenly a door opened, and the loud voice audibly preceded the person of the King. The next moment Philip was so much lost in astonishment that for an instant he was speechless. He saw before him a man dressed in the shabbiest fustian, much patched and discoloured. Closer scrutiny revealed, however, a certain indefinable something about the wild-looking personage which betokened gentle birth; besides, even the laugh was not that of a farmer, though the appearance was so poverty-stricken. The man himself was short and thick-set, with the look betokening enormous strength, possessed in a remarkable degree by some short men. His eyes, deep set under scrubby, greyish eyebrows, had in them a keen, cunning expression; his nose was straight, and went far to redeem the rest of his face, whilst his mouth was barely hidden by a short, iron-grey beard and moustache.

The roar of laughter he had heard was disagreeable in the extreme, or so thought Philip Gillbanks, who was, however, doomed this evening to have his mind disturbed by the sight of strange contrasts, for just behind the King came a gentleman who, not unworthily, might have stood for the portrait of a French Marquis. His dress, face, manners, attitude, and bearing were in the highest degree courtly. He was so handsome that it was difficult to believe he could be found in the company of the short, stout, ruffianly-looking man who walked in front of him. His dress was of the style long forsaken by ordinary mortals, and included knee-breeches, velvet coat, buckled shoes, and hair which, though not powdered, had the appearance of so being, for nature herself had slightly tinged it with soft grey. His beautiful hands were at this moment toying with a gold snuff-box, as he gazed politely but with a slightly astonished air at Philip's dripping condition, and then at Philip himself.

There had been a smile round this gentleman's exquisitely-shaped and clean-shaven lips as he stepped into the hall, but Philip noticed that the amusement was at once concealed, and he received a bow so courtly but so distant as to make him suddenly realise, though unwillingly, the foolish appellative he had heard. This must surely be the "King," and the other was his buffoon.

All these thoughts flashed themselves through the unfortunate traveller's weary brain as he returned the bow, and said:

"I must ask you to forgive my intrusion,

if this is, as I now see it must be, a private house, but I lost myself on the fell, and a good-natured shepherd directed me here, giving me to understand——"

The short man again roared with laughing, but the courtly gentleman took up the word, and to Philip's intense astonishment he said:

"You will, perhaps, kindly forgive the King's merriment. It is occasioned by no other than Jim Oldcorn himself, who gave us a short description of the discovery of the unfortunate situation in which he found you. I am sure the King will be delighted to give you to-night what shelter and hospitality you may require."

"What the devil do you mean by losing yourself?" was the King's rejoinder. "However, as it's so late and Meretown is not close by, you must stay here. Betty, take this traveller to the guest room, the small one, mind, and he'll find food in the dining-room; he'll want no looking after. I'm off, Greybarrow; Oldcorn says those confounded Richardsons have been up to their tricks again with my lambs, and I'm going to see for myself."

"Ah!" said the Duke of Greybarrow; "just so."

"If they think they are going to graze over my land, and then play their tricks with respect to my property, I'll show them the contrary."

"Just so!" repeated the Duke, and after bowing again, Philip found himself following the silent Betty down a corridor, then up some dark, creaking stairs, along another passage, and finally, nearly breaking his neck over two unexpected steps, he was ushered into a small room, smelling of damp or dry-rot. Beggars must not be choosers, but when Betty, having intimated that if he placed his wet things outside she'd see what she could find for him from the Prince's wardrobe, he was fairly mystified.

At last, left alone, Philip burst into a hearty laugh, promising himself the mental pleasure of giving a thrilling account of this strange adventure to his sister and to Forster Bethune.

"King, Queen, Duke, Princess, and now Prince! Good heavens! Is this a madhouse, or am I mad, or is the world gone forward or backward? When I was last in my senses it was Her Gracious Majesty, Lady Queen Victoria, who was on the throne of England, and there was certainly a Duke of Edinburgh, but none of Greybarrow. Well, I'm under cover,

anyhow; but the Duke! Certainly his brother, or uncle, or whatever relationship he accepts, should change places with him. The throne would really have been well filled by such a specimen of a true courtier. Let us hope the Prince takes after his uncle and not after his father. Besides, His Majesty seems to use unparliamentary language, and to have no objection to tramping out in this abominable rain. They are all mad, and I had better humour them and depart as early as I possibly can to-morrow morning. To-night it is impossible."

After these reflections Philip undressed, and was not sorry, though again surprised, when the now familiar voice of the shepherd announced to him just outside his door that a suit of the Prince was thought by Betty to be just about the right size for him.

Philip opened the door, again laughing inwardly at the idea that the shepherd was also the valet in this extraordinary household.

"Yê two didn't differt seah much," said Jim Oldcorn, holding up a suit of rough garments.

Philip, being in no position to be proud, was nevertheless glad to see that the Prince's garments were certainly many degrees superior to those of the King. Indeed, they were much like the ordinary suit of a country gentleman who has no vanity and cares more for durability than for cut.

Philip was a tall, well-grown young man, possessed of pleasant blue eyes and an open countenance which at once inspired strangers with confidence. Shabby clothes could not turn him into a cad. To his unspoken relief he found that he really was not very unlike himself in these borrowed plumes, and he was glad of the discovery. A man in dry clothes looks out upon the world in a better frame of mind than when he is in a dripping condition. Indeed, this episode had so awakened his curiosity as almost to overpower his hunger, but not quite. So in a very short time he opened his door, seized the brass candlestick, wherein guttered a dip candle, peered about him down the passage, wondering if Jim Oldcorn were again going to act as valet, or whether the house possessed any more men-servants more in agreement with the courtly names of its masters, and started on a voyage of discovery.

No one was about and nothing was to

be seen. The wind whistled sadly in the eaves, and the rain beat against the window-panes. Philip even fancied he could still hear the Rothery foaming, dashing and howling along its bed of rocks. How was he to find his way about this somewhat dilapidated Palace? Trying to remember his bearings he started forth, now only anxious to reach the spot where food was to be found.

After losing his way several times he found himself once more in the great hall, and then, recognising the door from which the King had issued, he boldly entered it. A lamp was burning on the table, and a clean plate was set. A large joint of beef, a jug of ale, a huge loaf, some butter, and a dish of custard were placed on the table. There was no footman, and nobody to help him, but hunger is not punctilious, and Philip, feeling weary, but duly grateful, was soon eating what was before him as if he had not eaten for a week. Every now and again he burst into a low laugh at the bare recollection of the King's strange attire, and at Oldcorn's intimate knowledge of the duties of a "valet-de-chambre." After a while he had eyes for something besides beef and bread, and having helped himself to a large plateful of custard and jam, he was able to notice that the old silver sparingly scattered on the table would have filled a collector with jealous despair.

Certainly no mushroom family—and Philip did not exclude the firm of Gillbanks and Son—would have had the chance to buy such things. Further, to his intense surprise, Philip noticed that on each article a small crown was engraved, and beneath it was the motto: "*Absolutus sum ignavia.*"

"*'I am acquitted of cowardice,'*" murmured Philip. "Well, anyhow, there is some modesty in that remark, though I suppose it means 'I am braver than others,' when the words are used under a crown! By the way, I wonder what is the name of this extraordinary family? The King of Rothery is certainly euphonious—but the man!"

Whereupon Philip laughed again, and this time with such thorough enjoyment of the situation that he had to put down the knife wherewith he was helping himself to cheese. At this moment, to his shame and confusion, the door opened and a young man entered. Philip had not a moment's doubt in his mind that it was the Prince. "By the cut of his clothes

shalt thou know the size of his brain," says an old proverb, and Philip settled that, weighing by this measure, the Prince's brains were of no vast circumference. But he had hoped to find personal beauty, and in this he was disappointed. Though tall and broad, the Prince had no pretension to good looks; indeed, from the slow way he entered the room, the girlish blush that spread over his face, and the stammer that hindered the understanding of his speech, Philip decided that the heir to the throne was, alas, more fool than knave. But there was a certain look of appeal for sympathy, and a certain nervousness of expression in the young man's face, which went straight to Philip's heart, and which he could not account for.

"Excuse me," said the Prince; "I hope you have had all you require? We don't make much show at the Palace, but my uncle sent me to see if you are a smoker. If you cared to smoke he would like you to try this brand. I believe they are good, though I don't speak from experience, and my father only smokes a pipe."

Philip had risen quietly at the Prince's entrance, and accepting the cigar with a bow, wondered how such a smoker as the Duke of Graybarrow and the Prince of Rothery could live side by side.

"It is very kind of—of—" he hesitated.

"The Duke of Graybarrow," said the youth simply. "I was forgetting you had not been introduced to my uncle. My father was so much amused by Oldcorn's description of your plight on the fell that he forgot to be civil."

The forgetfulness was fictitious, thought Philip, slightly nettled, but it is impossible to speak your thoughts to your host, so he was silent.

"It was scarcely kind of the swain," he said, smiling, "to reveal the secret sorrows of a wandering bookman."

"Ah!" said the Prince, "you are from college, perhaps?"

He spoke as if this institution were situated in some fairy region, not easily discoverable.

"I am bidding good-bye to the Alma Mater, and before deciding as to my future career, I thought I would tramp a little among your lovely mountains; but even here my bad luck pursued me."

The Prince seemed to be searching in some far recess of his brain for an appropriate answer to this speech, but finding none, he hunted up some matches for his

guest and retired. In another moment, however, he returned.

"When you have finished your cigar, perhaps you will come and join us in the drawing-room. My father is out, but——"

"Thank you," said Philip, "but I had no intention of intruding myself into your——"

He could not say palace, so he paused, and the Prince, moving uneasily first on one foot, then on the other, seemed strangely disconcerted, till suddenly a bright idea struck him.

"I will come back and fetch you. My mother keeps early hours, but the Princess will be glad to see a stranger; very few ever come here."

The Prince managed to get out of the room in a hurried, shambling fashion, and Philip was again left to himself. He lighted his cigar, and walking to the window, he musingly watched the pouring rain beating against the uncurtained window, and listened to the melancholy howl of the wind.

Again he burst out laughing.

"What would Forster say to this? He would certainly be enchanted at such a novel adventure. Somehow or other he really must come here. A woman called a Princess would almost make him use bad language; for he declares that all women are born to be queens, and it is man's fault that sometimes they are something different!"

A RIDE TO LITTLE TIBET.

DR. LANSDALL has added yet another book to those he has already published about Asia. The earlier publications dealt respectively with Siberia, Russian Central Asia, and Central Asia, while this present book,* as its title denotes, deals with Chinese Central Asia, concerning which, particularly as to the relations between the Chinese and Russians, there is much of interest to be learnt. The object of the journey was to spy out the land for missionary purposes: to see what openings existed or were possible. Being advised that if he wished to travel by the Trans-Caspian Railway it would be advisable to first proceed to St. Petersburg to obtain the requisite permissions, Dr. Lansdell left London on the nineteenth of February, 1888,

* "Chinese Central Asia: a Ride to Little Tibet." By Henry Lansdell, D.D. London: Sampson Low, Marston, and Co., Limited.

for the Russian capital, calling on his way at Berlin on the Chinese Ambassador, from whom he received a letter, with the Ambassadorial seal, to the Governor-General of Ili, which was one of the districts which he proposed to visit. The first thing required at St. Petersburg was permission to travel as far by the Trans-Caspian Railway as possible towards Kuldja, which is a town on the borders of Russian and Chinese Central Asia. This, with the help of Sir Robert Morier, Lansdell was enabled to procure, together with official letters to the Russian Consuls at Kuldja and Kashgar, in Chinese Turkestan, and one from Sir Robert himself to the Governor-General at Tashkend in the Russian district. He also obtained permission to return to Russia should he, after entering Chinese territory, deem that a better plan than proceeding south into India. Before he received this permission, he had to draw up for official information an itinerary of his proposed journey, which, as it gives the route to which he principally adhered, it would be as well to give in full. It ran as follows:

"I expect to leave St. Petersburg tomorrow, or soon after, for Moscow; to stay not more than a week (for banking arrangements, etc.), then proceed direct to Batoum; from Batoum to Tiflis (stay two or three days); then to Baku and Askhabad (stay one or two days, perhaps); Merv (two or three days); Charjai (one or two days, to get, if possible, fishes, pheasants, etc., for specimens); Bokhara (about a week, to see places once again that I visited in 1882); Samarkand (three or four days); Tashkend (about a week, to purchase various necessaries); Vierny (two or three days to receive my luggage, sent forward from Batoum); Kuldja. I hope to arrive at Kuldja by May the first, and at Urumtsai by June the first, and then to meet my English interpreter, into China. If news reaches me that he arrives earlier, I shall hasten forwards; if I learn that he will come later, then I need not go through Turkestan quite so fast. I should like to arrive at Yarkand by September the first, and cross the Himalayas, and it is only in case of accident, sickness, or something important and unforeseen, that I should wish to return to Russia from Kashgar to Fergana."

Such was his plan, and over this long journey it will be impossible to follow him minutely, so we will simply select for notice any item of special interest or of difficulty. At Batoum he met his servant Joseph, who

had come direct from London with the heavy luggage, and soon after arrived at Uzun Ada, the western terminus of the Trans-Caspian Railway, where he commenced the journey through Russian Asia. At the place named Geok Tepe the train stopped long enough to allow Lansdell to scale the walls of the fortress where the Turkomans showed such desperate resistance to Skobelev. "The wall in some places is completely broken down, but enough remains to show what crude ideas of fortification the Turkomans possessed. Imagine a bank of earth thirty feet thick, finished on the top with breast-high inner and outer walls, and running for nearly three miles round a quadrilateral area like that of Hyde Park or Blackheath, but without their verdure, and you will have some idea of the proportions of the 'fortress' at Geok Tepe." At Askhabad Lansdell met with more assistance from the Russians, one of whom telegraphed to friends in Merv and other places to help him as far as possible. Another stopping-place was at Dushak, which is interesting to Englishmen as being the nearest point to our Indian railways, and is only four hundred miles from the Caspian, while the distance between Dushak to the Afghan frontier is only as far as from London to Doncaster. When starting from Merv, where a stoppage of a few days was made, more Russian kindness helped Lansdell on his way. He had had all the way a separate compartment in the one second-class carriage on the train—there was no first class—and now from Merv the second class only ran on certain days, and Lansdell had fixed on a non-second class day. However, the authorities placed at his disposal a whole third-class carriage, "wherein, if there was lack of cushions, there certainly was not of room, my only companions being my servant Joseph, and a messenger whom Colonel Alikhanoff was sending on business to Bokhara, and who, he thought, might be useful on the way." When Lansdell arrived at Charjui on the Oxus, six hundred and seventy miles from the Caspian, he had come by payment as far as the line was then opened to the public, and was here assigned, "free of charge, a wooden hut or maisonette, with slanting roof, built on a wheeled platform." The hut contained two chambers about ten feet long and nine wide. Each room contained a bedstead, a table, and two candlesticks. In this the Oxus was crossed by means of a bridge six thousand two hundred and thirty feet long—the longest

in the world. The first stoppage was at Bokhara, where lodgings had been provided by either the Emir or the Russian Residency—Lansdell could not make out which.

Lansdell had heard before of the manner in which the insane in this part of the world were treated, and during his stay asked to see one of the houses where they were kept.

"It was an ordinary native dwelling, presided over by a sort of mullah doctor, who was treating his insane patients as 'possessed of the devil,' and was dealing largely in charms for all comers, consisting of extracts from the Koran placed in receptacles to be worn on the afflicted part of the body. He sat in his room near a window, and outside was a little crowd of ignorant women, many of them said to be childless, who had come to consult this man in their troubles, and pay for his nostrums. This was sad enough, but the sight of the maniacs was pitiable; the case of one man especially, Akhmet Kul, from Karshi, who had been there six months, and, although chained by the ankles, kept violently jumping and dancing about. Unlike some of the others, when I gave him money or sweets, he threw them into the air, and appeared decidedly combative. Near him, chained to a wall, was a youth who had been there ten days only.

"What is the matter with him?" I asked.

"Oh!" said they, 'he has a devil.' Whereupon I took from his legs the chain, which they allowed me to purchase.

"Passing through a doorway, I found myself in a stable in which was a donkey, and, seemingly as little cared for, two maniacs, one of whom was jumping and crying, the place looking indescribably miserable and filthily dirty. Sitting outside in the sun, but chained, was an Afghan and another man of unknown nationality, who was evidently vain of his appearance, for, before a small looking-glass, he was continually combing his long and plentiful hair and beard. There were others on a loft who had been there three months; but some only fifteen days, and in all cases their stay was intended to be temporary." Certainly the lot of the insane is not a happy one in Bokhara, and the same state of things is mentioned as existing in many other places visited by Lansdell. Jews in Bokhara still labour under considerable disadvantages. They may not wear

silk garments with belt and turban, but cotton garments and black calico caps, and many for belts have only pieces of string. They may not ride a horse in the city, and if away from the town when mounted on an ass they meet a Mahommedan, they have to dismount; while a Mahommedan may smite a Jew, but the Jew must not retaliate.

Soon after leaving Bokhara the then end of the railway was reached, and the journey to Samarkand had to be completed by driving, and from Samarkand Lansdell had a drive of one hundred and ninety miles before him before he could reach Tashkend. On the way he passed the ruins of an old caravanserai, supposed to date from the sixteenth century. At Tashkend a house was put at his disposal by the hospitable Russians, and here Lansdell had to withdraw from the bank the roubles forwarded there—banks not existing further east—and take for them rupee notes, which he was advised were more negotiable.

From Tashkend the route lay to Lake Tsik-Kul, which was a big detour from the originally proposed route, which would have led straight to Vierny; but as the baggage, which was following, could not reach Vierny for several days, and as Vierny, on account of a recent earthquake, was not a convenient spot to rest at, it was determined to make the extra journey. Nothing of interest occurred while on the road to Tsik-Kul or on the return to Vierny, save that Lansdell came upon a settlement of the Kirghese, a nomad race of uncertain origin. They believe in an invisible world; also that the tops of mountains are inhabited. "Sickness is the work of the devil, and the intervention of invisible beings in the affairs of men is accepted without question." They also venerate objects of extraordinary character. "Thus near Tokmak is an enormous stone of unknown origin with a human figure rudely cut on one side, whereon every Kirghese in passing thinks it obligatory to place, as an offering, a piece of tallow." They respect cemeteries and tombs, and go frequently to the cemeteries to say their prayers.

At Vierny a long wait had to be made for the baggage, and even then a start was made without it, though news was to hand that it was coming up; indeed, it caught up the travellers at Yarkend and was despatched on to Kuldja. At Yarkend horses were purchased and also a

cart, and a couple of Cossacks were lent as escort to Kuldja. Under their escort the frontier of Russia and China was passed, and Lansdell arrived at Kuldja on the twenty-first of June. It may come as a surprise to some to learn that Russia and China actually touch here, as perhaps an impression might exist that Mongolia, Turkestan, and Manchuria are independent states. In reality they are all Russian or Chinese. Lansdell thought that, despite the passports, he might have trouble in getting across the frontier. He had, indeed, been advised that it would be impossible, and that the only way of entry was by way of Peking. But this is what happened.

"What the Cossacks said or did I know not; but the great doors with 'warders,' or painted dragons, flew open, my tarantass rolled majestically through, without my being stopped or, so far as I remember, asked for my passport, and in five minutes we were calmly driving through the fields of the Flowery Land, and among the Celestials, quizzing their pigtails, and feeling on excellent terms with ourselves and the world in general."

At Kuldja the new horses and cart—"arba"—were found, as well as the luggage, and the journey was resumed to Suining, the capital of the province. Here Lansdell made his first experience of a Chinese inn. He describes it as consisting of a large courtyard with rooms on two sides, with the third side and the centre occupied by horses, carts, and drivers. Foul straw and manure it was not considered necessary to remove, and through this he had to wade to his room, which was without flooring or any description of furniture; added to which the natives seemed to have no idea of privacy, and seemed to think it quite the thing to stroll in if they felt so inclined, while the windows were apparently, according to them, to be used to aid them in looking in, and not the occupants in looking out. In China, as in Russia, the authorities did all in their power to help him on his way, and having received further papers and documents, Lansdell returned to Kuldja.

Here preparations were made for the further start. The packages numbered fifty and weighed nearly two tons, including food, physic, clothing, furniture, books, maps, and stationery, instruments and arms, and presents. Osman Bai was engaged as caravan leader, and agreed to go as

far south as Aksu, a matter of twelve days' journey, and if necessary to Kashgar, and a start was made on Thursday, July the twenty-sixth, into Chinese Turkestan. Besides Lansdell, Joseph and Osman, there was an escort of forty-one, while Osman had three assistants to help him with the horses. A mountain range had to be crossed, and here, five thousand feet above the level of the sea, a few days' rest was taken at the gorge of Chapchal, where for their immediate neighbours the party had a small encampment of Kalmuks. Proceeding, a stiff climb led the party to the summit of the pass, from which the descent into the valley was easier and more gradual than the ascent from the north. From the Tekes valley, to which this descent led them, they had again to mount, this time the Muzart defile of the Tian Shan Mountains, which is a range one thousand five hundred miles long, and abounds in glaciers. In the course of this climb they came to a "black, tumbledown, smoky timber shed"—the last Chinese picket on the northern slope of the range, and here two of his escort left Lansdell to return home. After their departure the caravan proceeded to attack the Muz-davan, or Ice Pass. "The route leading up to the crest of the Muzart skirts the east of the Jalyn-Khatsyr glacier, and, blocked more or less with large stones, winds along the flanks of the lateral rocks. . . . The crest of the pass is saddle-shaped, and about a third of a mile in length, presenting the appearance of a little plateau sloping slightly towards the south, and affording a superb view right and left of the magnificent peak of the Tian Shan. . . . From the crest the road proceeds southwards, the cliffs sometimes on the right and sometimes on the left, whilst between them lay a hollow with a flat bed, along which, in summer, streams trickle towards the south." Proceeding, they came across a huge glacier. "Scattered over this sea of ice are innumerable specimens of coloured marbles. . . . Deep down in the layers of ice flow streams which are heard but not seen. Here and there the ice is cracked and broken up into crevasses or ice-wells, into some of which I would fain have peeped, but to approach them was perilous, since a false slip might entail a fall into an abyss." Journeying along through this grand scene, at one o'clock was reached a spot, Mazar-bash, five miles from the crest of the pass, where the most trying part

of the journey was to be encountered. Mazar-bash is on the eastern side of the sea of ice, where the ice was broken off almost vertically, leaving a cliff forty to fifty feet high, down which the party had to descend. "Needless to say, I dismounted, and presently came to the top of the cliff, down the face of which we were invited to scramble. It looked as if blocks of ice and debris had been hurled from above, and perhaps the face of the cliff to some extent broken away, and steps cut here and there; but how to get down whilst maintaining the perpendicular looked well-nigh impossible." However, by sliding, stepping, slipping, and jumping, the descent of the men was safely accomplished, and then came the turn of the horses, which is described as follows: "I do not remember seeing any ropes attached, but my horse was taken by one man at his head, while another held him back by the tail, and thus steadied, he was made to scramble and slide on legs or haunches as he chose, till something like terra firma was reached at the bottom of the glacier." Lansdell was told afterwards that about thirty are sometimes killed making this descent in a month, while he has the proud position of being the first European to completely cross the Pass of the Muz-davan.

It would be impossible to minutely follow the caravan through Chinese Turkestan, and we must only briefly mention a few events which occurred before the party met with the last difficulty—the crossing of the Himalayas.

At Aksu a stay of some considerable time was made. Here Lansdell saw a body being borne to burial. 'Unlike the staid procession of the West, this is done at Aksu with a rush. At death the chin of the corpse is tied with a cloth, and the thumbs of the hands are tied together as well as the big toes. Then the body, after being washed and laid out, is burned within twenty-four hours, mullahs at the cemetery reading the Koran.' He also visited the prison, which he describes as one of the most horrible he had ever seen. The prison at Kashgar was also visited, but Lansdell thinks it must have been got ready for him. It was suspiciously clean, and the special red tunics which three men wore who were serving a term for manslaughter, and who had been in prison for some time, were too spotlessly clean and new.

But leaving the rest of Lansdell's journey in Chinese Turkestan—his visit to Yarkend,

and his expedition to the province of Khotan—we must hurry on to conduct him over the Himalayas safely into Tibet. It was on the morning of Monday, October the twenty-ninth, that the caravan left the village of Kilian to clamber over half-a-dozen of the high passes of the world; and after two or three days' travel arrived at the snow line. The thermometer sank at night to many degrees below freezing-point, and "to avoid chapped hands and face, I resolved in these latitudes to wash only once a day, and that in the afternoon." The party was now at an altitude above that of any road in Europe, and was about to cross the Kilian Pass, which cannot be attempted by horses; their loads were accordingly transferred to "yaks," which are a species of oxen. Lansdell found them sure-footed, carrying him safely over rough ground more smoothly and with fewer jerks than a horse, especially downhill. The road led upwards through snow more than a foot deep, and at three o'clock an altitude of seventeen thousand feet was reached, and the party suffered from mountain sickness. Lansdell found out what it was in a very practical manner, for having been told that there were some partridges a hundred yards off, he took his gun, alighted from his yak, and started running. "Before I had proceeded many yards, however, my heart began to beat as if it would burst, and I had to sit down twice, take breath, and learn that such agility at altitudes equal to the top of Mont Blanc was quite out of place." The cold, too, became more severe with the setting of the sun. If a cup of hot coffee was not gulped down at a draught, what remained became frozen in a few minutes, and the ink with which Lansdell was trying to write his diary froze between the bottle and the paper. After the descent from this pass the route lay for some way along plains to the fort of Shahidula, which was the last Turki building seen by the party, the next houses they entered being in Tibet.

From Shahidula the route lay towards the Karakoram Pass, for which a start was made on November the sixth. When the start was made the weather was delightful, and the sun warm, but in a few minutes in the shade, "necessary for taking a view of the pass, my fingers became so cold that I feared frost-bite. Added to this, we were rising again, and I was so exhausted with the trifling effort of undoing and putting away the camera,

that I had to sit down and rest. The least exertion became a painful effort, and after the day's journey I could do little more than sit in my tent, rest my head on my hands, and neither write, read, nor even think." The next day they ascended to the height of seventeen thousand six hundred and eighteen feet, while later on an altitude of eighteen thousand five hundred and fifty feet was attained. Although they continued on their way safely they were frequently reminded of the perils of the journey by the number of skeletons, chiefly of horses, lying about. A man they met told them he had just lost six horses in the Saser Pass, and further on they found a pilgrim from Mecca with his horse dead and himself starving.

This Saser Pass was the next to be attacked, and Lansdell says that though he considered he had accomplished something in crossing the Muzart, "the Saser was far more difficult; the ice was of colossal proportions, and around us still towered snowy peaks to a height of more than twenty thousand feet above the sea." From this pass their way led to the summit of Karawal Dawan, fourteen thousand one hundred feet high, and from here they could distinguish in the valley below cultivated fields and two villages—the first houses they had seen for many days. The valley was soon reached, but the houses turned out to be mere hovels, not to be preferred to the tent. On setting out the next day they were in Tibet; the first sign to Lansdell of his caravan being in Her Majesty's dominions being the appearance of a good pack road, from which the large stones were cleared to either side. After ascending another pass seventeen thousand seven hundred feet in height, Lansdell reached Leh, where he received a warm welcome from the Moravian mission. "I was put up in a simply furnished but perfectly clean room, and never in my life did I get with such delight between a pair of clean sheets; for I had not been in a proper bed for five months, and again and again, for whole weeks at a stretch, had slept without undressing. Here, too, after listening to Joseph's patois only for four months, I heard once more English properly spoken, and enjoyed the delights of Christian society and fellowship. I had now kindred spirits with whom to talk over missionary matters, which we proceeded to do, and to consider my plans for Lassa."

Here we will leave Dr. Lansdell, as an account of his voyage homewards would not be of any general interest; but before we finish our account of this book, it will be interesting to note the distance travelled, the modes of travelling, and the time occupied from London to Sonamarg in Kashmir. The time occupied was two hundred and ninety-three days, of which one hundred and forty-six were stationary days, and one hundred and forty-seven travelling days. The distance covered was eight thousand nine hundred and thirteen miles, which were covered in the following manner: four thousand four hundred and thirty-seven by rail, eight hundred and thirty-six by water, one thousand four hundred and nineteen by driving, one thousand one hundred and twenty-nine by riding, and one thousand and ninety-two by driving and riding. Another calculation shows twenty-five days by rail at one hundred and seventy-four miles a day; six days by water at one hundred and fifty-two miles a day; and one hundred and sixteen miles by horses at thirty-one miles a day.

ON CANNOCK CHASE.

CANNOCK CHASE is one of those famous hunting-grounds in which England abounded centuries ago. But it no longer sees trained hawk or deer. Its glory cannot be said to have wholly departed from it, for it has still square miles of heather and breezy hills unscarred by modern tenelements; yet it is sadly diminished. From the centre of it one marks the trails of black smoke trending from the tall chimneys of the town and neighbourhood of Cannock, and observes with grief the miserable cottages of Hednesford perched on one of its most conspicuous eminences.

Year by year it becomes more circumscribed in area. A century hence, unless an Act of Parliament intervenes on its behalf, there will be nothing of it left for the people at large. The pebbly tracks which now cross it in many directions will by then be macadamised into hard, even thoroughfares. Perhaps an electric tramway will rush across the existing wastes, linking one colliery centre to another. And where one now has a sufficiently pellucid atmosphere and fine, bracing, unpolluted breezes—unless the quarter of the wind is from the south—the heavens may be canopied with smoke as in the Black

Country of Staffordshire, a dozen miles or so to the south.

In its present state, however, the Chase is still delightful. It is best approached from Penkridge, that pretty little old village some six miles from Stafford. The ascent from the valley of the Penk to the ridge of the Chase is then gradual and endurable. The red houses are soon left in the hollow; the coppices and woods of Teddesley—once part of the Chase—swell on the one hand with, in October, gorgeous blazes of crimson nestled in the dark green bays where the hawthorns of the lodges are in the full garishness of autumnal decay; and the long, bosky ridge at the sky-line makes one doubt if there can be aught remaining of the open space of heather, bracken, and bilberry plants for which the Chase was, and, in fact, still is, renowned.

But the road climbs shrewdly past the coppices, in which the pheasants are chortling their unique note of alarm, and soon carries one to the girdle of fir plantations which is one of the prime charms of the district. The colours here in October are splendid. There can be no more alluring contrast of glorious orange and gold, and amber and clouded purple. The bracken and heather about the stems of the firs make a divine tapestry. Overhead the fleecy clouds are speeding across a background of heaven's own blue. The sunlight plays at hide-and-seek among the trunks of the trees, and the merry wind, full cool for the time of the year, sings through the fir-tops and bustles the moribund bracken somewhat rudely. In a hollow to the left a still pool reflects firs, clouds, and sunshine impartially. The high-road has all in a moment become a series of parallel ruts in the gravel, with grass and heather tufts between the ruts.

The fir belt traversed, the undulating Chase is attained: treeless and bleak, but on such a day beautiful withal. Even the rusted heather is not without grace. Instead of its dazzling crimson of a month back, there is a faint tender purple—an atmosphere difficult for the artist. They have set fire to the heath in many places. The result is strong: instantly recalling the slopes of Etna. The soil is turned a jetty black by the charred twigs and ash dust; and through this, new bracken in its spring-time verdure has shot upwards thickly. Here again the colour contrasts must be seen to be enjoyed aright. The

bilberry plants have gone red as blood. The older bracken strives towards every hue under the sun. It is impossible not to exult over this scene of dappled enchantment. For a few minutes, too, the sense of solitude is supreme. We have not attained the watershed of the Chase: the northern and eastern horizons are severed by the parti-coloured undulations, and behind, the fir belt still intervenes between us and the spacious landscape of the west, dominated by the old Wrekin. Were it not for the significant smoke-drifts from the south, the imagination might take this for a wholesome piece of the Scottish Highlands.

Two objects now declare themselves. The one is a red lodge set by the track a mile or so ahead, the other is a solitary birch-tree more to the left. The frantic barking of a dog in the lodge soon tells of the quick scent or hearing powers of the brute. When we near the building he is fain to snap his chain with rage. The apple-cheeked man who appears has much ado to stifle the beast's voice sufficiently for conversation. He represents the lord of Beaudesert Park, the demesne on the hill to the right, with its gaunt, wind-shattered trees in the dimples of the land. There are birds among the heather and manorial rights or pretensions to be maintained. Of late an attempt has been made to hinder pedestrians from roaming at large over the heather; they must keep to the dim tracks or suffer prosecution. The towns adjacent to the Chase are already protesting, and the issue of this final struggle over the almost dead carcass of this magnificent old hunting-ground will be interesting whichever way it goes. The squat houses of Hednesford show in the distance as a warning. All too soon, it may be, their fellows will be studded here also, where nowadays the partridges find tolerable entertainment.

At a meeting-place of six weak tracks we deviate by the next to the left after passing the stump of a sign-post. The Chase soon discloses more of its glories. The dimples between the hills get deeper. Sparse companies of birch-trees and oaks appear on their slopes. They have been terribly ill-used by the storms; this, however, does but add to their picturesqueness. The wooded slopes of the land on the north bank of the Trent are also visible, veiled by the rain falling heavily upon them. And looking north-west, a square dark mass of masonry is seen

quaintly peering above a long shoulder of the Chase in that direction. This is the top of the Keep of Stafford Castle, full seven miles away. The sight of this relic of a thousand years harmonises well with the view of the Chase itself, on which our early Kings sought—and doubtless found—good sport with their hawks and hounds.

Hence our track strikes sharply downhill between two rounded sides of moorland. There is a great two-horsed wain near, and men and women are seen cutting and gathering the crisp bracken. "It be rare good stuff for lighting fires," says one of the men. As fuel, indeed, it is always in request, whether coal be dear or at its normal price. A little lower down we clash with two women treading on the skirts of one of the little wooded tumps—as they would call them farther south—which on the Trent side of the Chase are a distinct feature of the district. "We'm only a-sticking," they say. The nose of one of them is for all the world like a sugar-loaf or a candle-extinguisher.

Down through the gravelly cranny, with the heather and bracken still thick about us, and the valley of Trent coming nearer at every step. Up go a covey of partridges and off with a whirr to the other side of the wire netting which here marks the beginning of more enclosures and plantations. One may carp at these nibblings at the Chase; but there is no denying the pretty effect of the knolls of beech-trees and firs which crest the little hills on this main declivity riverwards. The effect is enhanced, too, by the shaving of the bracken beneath them into squares and oblongs.

The valley air is much less of a tonic than that of the Chase; but the valley itself is worth seeing. Nowhere is the Trent more sweet and pure to the eye. It comes hither from the woods of Shugborough—where circumnavigator Anson was born in 1697—refined and good to see. A single swan breasts the stream close under the bridge, and its plumage is as white as the river itself seems irreproachable. The sun shines strongly on the green weed under the water.

The two old dames with their sticks joined us in the little inn up the lane. They were clearly brave-hearted old creatures. One of them, who appeared under sixty, confessed to eighty-three. She accepted a sixpence, with some doubt at first, but later with affecting gratitude and the words:

"It isn't often I meets with a friend now."

The parish was her best friend, at half-a-crown a week. But parochial charity is too impersonal a matter, it seems, to touch the hearts of its recipients.

Another excellent day may be spent by approaching the Chase from Lichfield, crossing it by Beaudesert, the seat of the Marquis of Anglesey, and leaving it at Cannock. This shows us the best charms of the district and also its greatest degradation.

Lichfield needs no crier to proclaim its graces. Who that has viewed its Cathedral from the farther side of the lakelet to the south, on a fine autumnal day, when the gorgeous crocketed spires, the foliage of the trees, and the shapes of the clouds are all mirrored impartially in the pool, will ever forget the old, yet ever rejuvenated building? It is as well, too, to bear in mind that this is Samuel Johnson's native city. There is an ugly monument of him in the market-place. It shows him seated in an arm-chair beneath which books—lexicons from their size—are most unconventionally and inconveniently stacked. He looks very miserable, as well he may, thus exposed with his beloved books to all kinds of weather. But though as a work of art the thing is poor, the statue will always be suggestive. There is better work in the Cathedral. Unless you have seen the two sleeping children at Lichfield you cannot have an adequate idea of Chantrey's powers.

Anciently, Lichfield was just within the bounds of the Chase. It is very different nowadays. One must walk three or four miles ere getting to its hem, and even then there are on this side no fine open expanses of heather as east of Penkridge. The lords of the manor shrewdly got their hands upon the land long ago. They have turned it into noble demesnes, or just helped Nature to continue in the path she trod here an indefinite number of millenniums back.

The three spires of the Cathedral are soon lost. The road north is extremely undulating, though with a smart general rise. Only in the occasional giant oaks, the firs, and the thick bracken in the hedgerows, do we see indications that this was once as wild land as that north of Beaudesert. It is not a very interesting road. But the higher we get the broader becomes the landscape north-east. Fields and woodlands for many a mile mark the vale of Trent

and its tributaries. At Longdon, four miles from Lichfield, we choose one of the three inns which seem to over-accommodate the village, and rest awhile. These rustic hostelries are always diverting. On this occasion the entertainment, though strong, is rather gloomy to boot.

Four men are assembled over their cups. It is the time of the Great Coal Strike. Naturally, this is their topic of talk. One of the men is a villager, another is a needy knife-grinder, a third is a collier from Yorkshire who has walked hither seeking work in the Cannock district—and—curious irony—the fourth is a collier from Cannock bent on walking north to see if there he may haply earn a livelihood. The hardness of the times is the one subject on which they all agree.

The villager of the four is a veteran, with a long and somewhat bitter tongue.

"Talk about your being half-starved and clemmed!" he cries to the man from Yorkshire, who has twopennyworth of bread and cheese with his beer, "could a mon as was hungry stop to scrape his cheese?"

For several minutes there is a clash of angry adjectives. The Yorkshireman does not choose to have his words and deeds so nicely measured. But the landlady interferes with a reprimand, "I don't hold with swearing in my house," and matters gradually sober.

"Well, well," says the knife-grinder, as if his was the vocation of peacemaker, "we'm all born."

"Ay," responds the Cannock man, "and some of us wouldn't be if us could help it."

The village ancient here rises laboriously from his corner, totters to the speaker and lays his hand solemnly on his shoulder, saying:

"You're right, lad, you're right."

Either this praise, or the sudden sight of the knife-grinder's machine at the door, sets the Cannock man upon the knife-grinder himself.

"Look here now," he says warmly, "tell me how to earn a day's money. I doan't care what it be at, but I'm thirsting for it, fair thirsting for it. Tell me."

The knife-grinder, unawed by the almost ferocious earnestness of the poor collier, just draws the back of his hand across his mouth and remarks with a smile:

"Well, I'll tell yo'. Use your own judgement, that's the way to do it."

The storm that ensued upon this rejoinder was terrific. We left it at its

height. Village inns are not the enlightening places they once were, but even nowadays they ought not to be beneath the attention of men who wish to learn how the people in the provinces talk, and what they think about.

From Longdon we climbed by devious byways to the lodge gates of Beaudesert. The park was fascinating in its warm October colours in the bracing October air. The Hall is a mellow old building of purple-red brick, embosomed—in October—in russet and gold foliage. It stands well over the Trent valley, fronting the east with truly British indifference to the winds and weather. From the oak fencing of its park we see the spires of Lichfield once more, well-nigh seven miles distant. Nearer at hand are the houses of Rugeley, at the foot of the Chase, with the Trent watering its meadows. Rugeley's fame still centres mainly upon Mr. Palmer, the poisoner. There are plenty of people in the little town who remember him, and express their wonder that so pleasant-mannered a person should have come to such an end.

You will nowhere see pheasants tamer than those on the Beaudesert estate. Four cock-birds allowed us to walk unreservedly within ten paces of them in the high-road. Even then they did not protest against the intrusion with a noisy whirr of wings. Not a bit of it. They skipped lightly into the coppice on one side, and there they stayed pecking at insects in the grass. It seemed the easiest thing in the world to thrust a hand after them and grasp them by their tails.

More engrossing were the antics of a couple of squirrels, who tumbled each other about in the roadside bracken with the like disregard for bipeds. But when they departed they did it with a theatrical flourish. One—two—three—and they were high up the lichened trunk of an old oak.

You will find most kinds of northern trees in this park of Beaudesert, and bracken galore. Nothing more need be said to convince of its beauty in mid-October. The dead beech and oak-leaves are crisp under foot, and their pungent perfume is quite noteworthy. So, too, is the keen air of the Chase as we ascend and ascend until we are in the breezy outskirts of the park, where the trees are blown to bits, where they gradually become rarer, until they cease to be, and only the heather moorland with its fine lofty line against the sky is left to dignify the

Chase. And yonder, conspicuous in the midst of this upland reach, is the small red lodge already mentioned in the walk from Penkridge.

Hence to Hadnesford is a good three-mile trudge. The heather gets more and more meagre on the Chase banks by the roadside. The dirty red houses of the colliers are more and more strikingly ugly. And the black smoke from the tall chimneys hovers between the blue and white heavens and the autumnal, dun-coloured earth. But for the strike it would be very grimy in Hadnesford. As it is, the unfortunate colliers may be seen in knots, with their hands in their pockets, either discussing without enthusiasm or watching their more youthful brethren play pitch-and-toss.

There is nothing beautiful in Hadnesford, and the Great Coal Strike has added misery to the prevalent uncomeliness.

THE PLEASURES OF GOLF.

I AM a foreigner—"tout ce qu'il y a de plus—"; but hold, my pen, thou art on dangerous ground! The British like not the stories with which they enliven their leisure hours to be interspersed with phrases which need a dictionary for interpretation. I am a foreigner. Enough! I am staying in a charming country house in Scotland with a dear old rickety-kneed General of my acquaintance, and I am learning to golf.

The country house is near a seaside town. It is March; it is windy; also sandy. Every day of my life I come home with more "grit" in me than when I went out. The day after I arrived General McShallop said to me: "You can't go back to your own country without knowing everything there is to know about golf. Not to golf is not to live. We will go for a turn on the links to-morrow."

Some people say that to-morrow never comes. They lie. It does, as I know to my cost.

There are some very charming girls staying in this same country house. One likes naturally to distinguish oneself in the presence of fair Amazons. I was, therefore, rather averse from the idea of learning a somewhat difficult and dangerous game before them. I had ascertained that they all started with the men in the morning, and came home with them to lunch; that they scorned the humble limits of the ladies' links, and preferred to go the whole

breezy round. Finding that I was in for it beyond a doubt, I not unnaturally asked my host for some account of the game, which I had never seen played in my life.

Now, golf is more than a game or a science. It is a fever and a passion. It was with some curiosity, therefore, that I listened to General McShallop's exposition of the same.

"You place your ball on a small mound of sand called a 'tee,'" he explained in as simple language as he could, in kindly deference to my imperfect knowledge of English, "and you hit it with your club."

Then he paused for such a long time that I began to think that this was the Whole Duty of the golfer, and spoke accordingly.

"Is that all? What do you do then?"

"You walk after it and hit it again," said the General solemnly.

There was another pause.

"That sounds easy," said I, with a sigh of relief, and speaking like a fool in his folly.

"It sounds easier, perhaps, than it is," said my host, with a ghastly smile. "Have you ever heard of 'bunkers'?"

I never had, although there vaguely flitted familiar wise across my mind the battle of Bunker Hill.

"When you strike off," said the General, leaving the subject of bunkers as one too painful to be proceeded with, "you see a road at some distance before you. The first difficulty for a beginner is to get over the road. Then you come to a steep incline, half rock, half grass. For this you will need a different club."

"How many clubs must I have?" I asked meekly.

The General made a rapid calculation.

"You can have thirteen," he answered.

"The Driver, the Bulger Driver, the Long Spoon, the Mid Spoon, the Short Spoon, the Putter, the Brassey, the Cleek, the Niblick, the Driving-Iron, the Putting-Cleek, the Lofting-Iron, and the Mashie; but then again, you can manage with very few if you like. To begin with, I should only recommend four—the Driver, the Cleek, the Putter, and the Lofting-Iron."

My brain reeled. I hastily abandoned the discussion of clubs and returned to the game.

"After you have driven off, and got over the road and the hill," I asked, "what then?"

"Then you see a red flag in a hole," said the General, as if this were a full, sufficient, and lucid explanation enough.

"I see. And then?"

"You 'put' the ball in," said the General, in astonishment at foreign ignorance. "And then you pick it up," he added, in fatigued anticipation of another question, "and make another 'tee,' and drive off again—over a bunker this time—and then there is a sort of hollow marsh which you must avoid, and then another bunker, and after that a burn—in which you are certain to lose your ball—and then a high stone wall, which very few beginners get over at first; and then there is the little ruined house, where the green-keepers have their tools, and which very often catches one's ball when one is not careful; and then——"

I stopped him. His rapid description appalled me. The golfing course appeared to be a kind of "Pilgrim's Progress" to me, with bunkers for Apollyons, and stone walls and burns for the Hill of Difficulty. I became "tumbled up and down in my mind," as John Bunyan hath it. Where did the Land of Beulah come in?

"And what is the end of the game?" I asked.

"When you have been the round, of course. Those who get into the holes in the fewest number of strokes win the game," said the General in a tired voice.

I have always been rather celebrated for getting into holes of a mental description in very few strokes indeed, so I did not despair yet about golf. It did, indeed, at first sight, and to the ignorant, appear a somewhat peculiar pastime, but as all Europe was going mad over it, and marking out ridiculous little golfing-grounds when and where it could, and as I was on the real spot where the real game was played, I determined not to lose the opportunity.

The morrow came, my host in fine form and knickerbockers, and the young ladies in business-like short skirts and Tam-o'-Shanter caps. It is a pity that this style of dress does not suit all girls—but there, the sex is always charming, even under the most disadvantageous circumstances.

One of the young ladies took pity upon my evident trepidation at breakfast time, and offered to break me in all by herself in an artless and charming manner, which would be impossible except in Britain.

"For, General McShallop," she added archly, "you know your foursome is made up, and as there are five of us girls, Monsieur de S—— and I will be left out in the cold, unless we play with each other."

This arrangement met with universal satisfaction. I could see that the foursome had been trembling in its shoes at the idea of having an ignorant stranger tacked on to it. For golf is also business.

As for me, of course, I am always pleased at the prospect of a tête-à-tête with one of Albion's fair daughters, especially when she happens to be the prettiest girl of the party. We started at last, the others well on in front, and Mademoiselle and I well behind. We walked over the coarse, sand-grown grass towards the little golf club-house, and the salt air blew sweet and strong in our faces.

Arrived there, I provided myself with the balls, the four requisite clubs, together with a seedy-looking caddy to carry the same, and we "started fair."

At this moment my pen arrests itself. That day, long ago now, comes back to my mind in all its vivid freshness. The blue, blue sea, the salt, breezy wind, the green links picturesquely dotted about with the scarlet jackets worn by some of the golfers, the pretty face of the girl by my side, the sordidly dressed caddy in the rear, and before us two nice little, clean white balls on two small mounds of sand, waiting to be launched into space.

My companion struck off first. She was playing with a cleek only, and it flashed brilliantly in the sunshine as she swung it high in the air. The ball vanished, became a mere speck, and then fell lightly and gracefully where all right-minded golf balls should fall—on the other side of the road.

It was now my turn. I received instructions how to place my feet, how to hold my club, to keep my shoulder always in the direction of the hole.

"Where is the hole?" I demanded haughtily of the caddy, when I was well fixed in a firm and rigid position, with my driver clasped with the tightness of despair.

"It's awa' ower the hill," he answered briefly; "ye canna see it fra here."

I prepared to strike.

"Lift your club slowly and bring it down quickly," said my fair companion, contemplating my statue-like attitude with a smile.

At this moment the caddy knelt down and officiously turned my toes in, adjusted the ball, looked critically at my thumb, which he tucked round the handle of the club, and rising, kindly allowed me to play.

I struck with the strength of a navvy. I expected to see the ball lost in space, but on looking down, I beheld it still reposing in all its snowy whiteness at my feet.

I was readjusted by the caddy, and required to assume an attitude in which I could hardly keep my feet. Again I struck—this time scattering the "tee" to the winds and ploughing a long furrow on the links. I had dugged a pit and fallen into the midst of it myself. The caddy frowned as he replaced the turf, and we journeyed on. I had not far to go—barely half-a-dozen yards in fact—and began to find being placed in position each time fatiguing. I waved the man aside, therefore, and struck my own way. This time I fell into the deepest rut in the road. My companion was very kind and encouraging, but it took me eight strokes to get to where her ball lay. Then she played again and lifted it easily and gracefully on to the hill, whilst I followed after as best I could. I found the hole with the red flag, and went in in thirty-four. I believe it has been done in three.

From thence I pursued my unhappy flight from hill to vale, from burn to bunker. I lost two balls in the burn, and as for the bunker—I went down into the pit alive.

I sent the caddy on ahead after my companion, preferring to potter about alone. Whenever they were not looking, I picked up my ball and carried it along, finding that by so doing I could golf much faster, and, indeed, almost keep up with Mademoiselle.

"You have improved," she said to me on one occasion, when I arrived on the putting-green in eight strokes, having carried my ball all the way from the last bunker.

And I admitted that I had.

After the burn came the wall—a great stone affair which you fired at from an eminence in the hope of destroying it. Many savage blows has that wall endured in its day! Indeed, Puritan as one might suppose the Scotch links to be, I have heard language used thereon which would not disgrace Whitechapel on a Sunday night. But golf, like love, excuses all.

Beyond the wall lay a smooth putting-green, then another wall, then—but why enumerate all the deadly obstacles placed in the way of harmless, peaceable individuals who wanted to golf and enjoy themselves in a sensible manner? Had

the valleys been exalted and the hills made low, had the crooked been made straight and the rough places plain, we might have managed the game fairly well. As it was—

"How do you like it?" asked Mademoiselle, as we came back on the homeward course.

"Immensely," I replied, as a ball whistled past my ear, narrowly escaping braining me. "There are elements of difficulty and danger about it that render it the most fascinating of games."

There was a large 18 on the iron flag which marked the hole before me. I went in in eighteen strokes, and felt proportionately triumphant, until it was pointed out to me that the eighteen referred merely to the number of the hole, and not to the strokes supposed to be played.

"We will come again to-morrow," said my fair companion cheerfully, picking up her ball. "You will soon get into the swing of it."

I walked home rather sadly, and my dreams that night were of yawning chasms, of desolate sea-shores, of rapid rolling rivers bearing fated golf balls on their bosoms, of insurmountable stone walls that rose, like Fate, ever higher between the golfer and the Promised Land.

The General and his foursome came home in high spirits. They talked during luncheon of cleeks and niblicks, of "going in in four," and of the hard tricks that destiny had played them. Immediately after lunch they started off again, faint yet eager. For golf is also life.

Mademoiselle and I stopped at home and played billiards. Is there anything a British maiden cannot do?

The next morning I was not ill-pleased to see from my bedroom window that a light snow had fallen during the night, and wrapped the earth in a soft shroud of cotton wool. I descended gaily, like the troubadour of old, with the thought in my head, "No golf to-day."

Alas for the ignoble foreigner and the energetic British!

"No golf to-day," I said aloud to my fair companion of the Tam-o'-Shanter.

"No golf!" she echoed; "why not? General McShallop is going out as usual."

Of course if a rickety-kneed, white-haired old General could do this thing, I, even I also, was bound to pin my colours to the mast.

"Shan't we lose a good many balls in the snow?" I objected feebly.

"We shall play with red ones," she answered decidedly. "It is great fun."

We certainly did play with the red balls, but I am not quite so sure about the fun.

In a week's time, during which we golfed daily in all weathers, I began to learn that familiarity breeds contempt. I no longer trembled before the rutty road; I surveyed the steep incline with calmness; the wall, the burn, and the bunker had all lost their terrors. I spoke in assured tones of clubs and their uses. I assumed professional attitudes, put aside my caddy with a haughty hand, and wriggled in a truly professional manner. For, to golf, you must wriggle and tie yourself into as many knots as possible, and the more you writhe the better you will play. I became finally calm enough to scrutinise the other players on the links. They were always the same set, feverishly worshipping at the shrine of their idol. There were a great many Majors and Generals and such small deer scattered about. I suppose the golfing links, with their flying, whistling balls, vaguely recalled the hiss of the bullet on the battle-field to the veterans' minds. Perhaps, too, here is to be found the oddest mixture of society possible anywhere. Pride of class disappears where golf is concerned. I have seen a Baronet golfing with a butler. Who would think of calling in "Jeames" to have a game at billiards if a more kindred soul were wanting?

Accidents, of course, occasionally happen, but they are of rare occurrence. One day, a week before I returned to my native country, my original companion and I were golfing together alone. Suddenly she gave a little shriek.

"Oh, dear, I have lost my head!" she exclaimed.

I had assured her that this was a thing I often did, before I understood that she was referring to her club, which lay headless before me. She was looking very pretty indeed just then, with a bright colour in her cheeks, and all her fair hair blown about her face. I took hold of the stick, and we held it between us. It was rather romantic. I became sentimental.

"I have lost something worse than that," I murmured.

"Not your ball again, I hope?" she interrupted rather sharply.

"No—my heart—"

She loosed the stick and looked me straight in the eyes. Really, there is a frank and unabashed candour about these British maidens that—

She did not pretend to misunderstand me.

"I am going to have my head put on in the right place again," she remarked as she walked away from me. "I should advise you to do the same thing with your heart. Cracked things always last the longest."

Four weeks of uninterrupted and delightful intercourse had brought me to this! For calm audacity and unflinching presence of mind, this enchanting specimen of womankind had surpassed herself.

Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of—golf!

DOCK LIFE.

DOWN in the busy east of London, where the steady rumble of heavy vans laden with merchandise, the whirr and clang of cranes and the rattle of winches, resound always in the ears of the passer-by, stand two large gates, which are the entrance to the Mecca of the East End labourer. For here are the docks, whose business, directly or indirectly, gives employment to a great proportion of the lower stratum of dwellers in the east.

Every morning—at seven in winter, and six in summer—an eager throng pours through these gates, and surges up to the iron chains which span the wide roadway some hundred yards within. The space between these chains and the gateway is soon packed with several hundred "dockers" clamouring vociferously to the "taking-on" foremen, standing in their little pulpits high above the crowd, for the tickets whose possession gives them a day's work. Hundreds go away unsatisfied, for there are at least three applicants to every vacancy, and seek consolation in the neighbouring pubs, or hang around the dock gates on the off-chance of a second "call" at nine or ten o'clock. The comments of these disappointed individuals as they loaf away dejectedly are often characteristic.

"'E ain't no bloomin' good to a working man, 'e ain't," says one burly docker, with a straw in his mouth, pointing the finger of scorn at a foreman who has made up his tale of labour without including the speaker, "taking on all boys agin this mornin'."

"Blowed if yer ain't right, too, Jim," assents another disappointed applicant, a rat-eyed, waspish little man, with a terrible reputation for sarcasm as it is understood in Wapping. "Lor' bless yer, I could make a better man nor 'im outer two sticks an' a lump o' coal." He expectorates vigorously as he finishes this tirade, and then wends his way with the rest of the discontented mob to the gates.

Those who have been more fortunate in securing the coveted ticket are now distributed throughout the docks. According to the necessities of the authorities, they are told off to the wool warehouses, the wine vaults, the dry goods stores, the open quays to which goods are transferred from vessels lying alongside, or down to the inmost recesses of these vessels, to assist in breaking-out their cargoes. Of all these various employments, the last is the most dreaded, and only seasoned dockers can stand it for any length of time, the strain upon the constitution being most severe. Working thirty feet down in a ship's hold, in semi-darkness, surrounded by a stifling atmosphere, and with the body never for a moment during the whole day in an erect position, is no joke, as the present writer can assure any one who wishes to try the experiment. Fortunately the same men are seldom required to work more than two days a week at this particular task.

The other kinds of toil, especially those conducted in the warehouses, are by no means so exacting, and many a pipe is smoked, and many a gallon of beer drunk behind those huge bales of wool which periodically fill every floor of huge buildings extending over several acres. Both these descriptions of amusement are of course strictly forbidden by the Dock Company's regulations, and many are the devices resorted to by ingenious dockers to indulge in these tabooed delights. Both ale and rum are brought in wholesale in harmless-looking tea-cans, which are seldom examined by the dock police at the gates, and these go backwards and forwards for replenishment all through the day. A new hand is generally selected for the somewhat perilous task of running the gauntlet with these forbidden luxuries. No labourer is allowed to leave the docks—except for dinner—during work-time without a written permission from his foreman. The faces of the old stagers, those who come every morning, week after week and year after year, are

of course well known to the dock police, and they dare not run the risk—even to obtain beer. But the new hand, whose face is not yet familiar to the dock officials, and who has not yet acquired the indefinable stamp of the regular docker, is the very man for the purpose. So by judicious coaxing, intermixed with a little judicious bullying, the new-comer is persuaded to fill his pockets with these innocent-looking cans, and to stroll aimlessly out of the docks to the nearest tavern. Once safely outside return is easy and without risk, if the "runner," as he is called, is not known to the police. So many people enter the docks daily on various errands that scarcely any notice is taken of them. While the "runner" is absent, his comrades cheerfully do his work, and conceal his departure from the foreman. If he be a very green hand, he will be kept busy at the same errand all day long, as dockers are thirsty souls, and every "runner" has his day. After a week or two the risk of detection increases, and a fresh Mercury has to be found. The regular fee for each successful trip is "half-a-pint," or a penny in cash, and a new hand finds it easy to earn a couple of shillings a day at this work, while he is also being paid sixpence an hour by the Dock Company. Until one has actually tried the experiment, no one would believe the number of bottles and flat tin cans which can be stowed away in a rough pea-jacket, especially if a ragged overcoat be put on over it. An expert "runner" will safely convey a gallon of beer and several small bottles of rum every journey.

The regulations against smoking are still more strict than those against drinking, and are more difficult to evade. Still, a good deal of surreptitious homage is paid to the goddess Nicotine in the various out-houses and so on, one of the gang being told off to keep watch for any prowling constable. Most dockers also indulge in chewing, which is permitted, and so manage to satisfy their craving for tobacco in a legitimate manner. It is, by-the-by, an offence under the Company's bye-laws for any labourer to have in his possession either pipe or matches, so the old stager conceals his cutty in some warehouse, and carries his matches in his boot!

What has been said above is ample proof that the docker is a man of resource, and fully understands in his own humble way the art of living. He carries the same principle into his work; he regards

it as a necessary evil, and does not do one iota more than he can help. Foremen vary very much in disposition, but most of them recognise the advantage to themselves of having plenty of men for the work in hand, as things go more smoothly, even if the Dock Company's pocket suffers. One day a foreman in a particular department found that after dinner he had absolutely no work for his gang to do. While his men were enjoying their enforced idleness, suddenly the awful tidings came that the dock superintendent, with several directors, were making a tour of the docks, and were even then in the next warehouse. The foreman was in despair. What was to be done? An old and astute docker approached him, and a whispered colloquy ensued. The result was soon apparent. The men had that morning been engaged in repairing gunny bags to hold rice. These, all finished, were piled up neatly at one end of the floor. In five minutes they were all ripped open again, and when the big-wigs entered the warehouse, four-and-twenty men were industriously engaged in sewing them up again!

A good deal of smuggling and petty thieving goes on daily at the docks, not that the average docker is worse than other labourers, but because smuggling especially possesses an inherent charm for him out of all proportion to the value of the article surreptitiously conveyed out of the docks. Many good stories are told of the ingenious manner in which both constables and Custom House officers have been outwitted. One foggy day, a docker working aboard a vessel in the Central Basin had the ill-luck, apparently by accident, to fall overboard. He could swim, but it was some little time before he could be got out, and he then seemed almost done up. All cold and exhausted as he was, his sympathetic chums placed him on a plank and soon ran him out of the docks to a neighbouring public-house. There he was stripped and put to bed between hot blankets. As soon as he recovered, he evinced an uncommon anxiety as to the safety of his clothes, and no wonder, for the linings of his pea-jacket and baggy corduroys were the receptacle for some fifteen pounds of tobacco, done up in waterproof wrappings. This was eventually purchased by the owner of the tavern.

Dock labourers are a democratic lot. They have but little respect for their foremen or even for a dock director, and none at all for each other. Some time

ago a docker was charged at Thames Police Court with attempting to commit suicide. He had been seen in broad daylight to jump off the quay into the South Dock. An eye-witness, a fellow-labourer, was called to give evidence.

"Did the prisoner deliberately jump into the water?" asked the magistrate.

"Well, as to that, howsomever, I can't say, but I'll go bail for it 'e never meant to commit sewerside. 'E can swim as well as I can. 'Sides, 'e's too precious fond of 'is bloomin' life to risk it while he can borrow a bob of any one. A lazy, good-for-nothing 'ound, that's what 'e is!"

The prisoner was eventually dismissed with a caution.

In conclusion, let not the reader fancy from the above brief notes that the docker's life is one of unalloyed bliss. He has his bad days when, wet and cold and hungry, he loafs aimlessly about the dock gates, waiting for work which never comes. He is poorly paid at the best of times; he has little leisure when at work, he is indifferently lodged, and the finer joys of life are not for him. Small wonder if at times he seek refuge from the monotony of his existence in the coarse pleasures of the beer-shop and gin-palace. Small wonder if his intellect, denied all legitimate vent, is turned to deeds of low cunning and doubtful morality.

THE ABDUCTION OF A KING.

THE abduction of Stanislaus Augustus, King of Poland, in the very midst of Warsaw, his own capital, was probably as audacious an exploit as any body of conspirators ever conceived or accomplished. Perhaps I should say "nearly" accomplished, since at the last moment the King effected his escape, but in its earlier stages the attempt was completely successful. The instigators of the offence were the confederated Polish nobles, who had never recognised Stanislaus as lawfully elected; and, not without reason, looked upon him as the mere tool of Russian tyranny.

The man who planned the details of the abduction was the celebrated Polish patriot, Pulaski. He it was who engaged a body of forty adventurers to carry it out, under the leadership of three daring men, Lukowski, Strawinski, and Kosinski, whom he had won over, and who had sworn to deliver up to him the King, dead or alive.

Making their way by stealthy journeys

from Czitschokow, in Great Poland, they entered Warsaw, on the second of November, without having been discovered. They were disguised as peasants in charge of carts loaded with hay, under which were concealed their saddles, weapons, and ordinary dress.

They did not all penetrate into the heart of the city; some remained at the gates. The others, on the following evening, collected, with due precautions, in the Street of the Capucins; for they calculated, "from information received," that the King would pass that way on returning to his Palace at the accustomed hour.

And so it happened.

Between nine and ten o'clock, leaving the residence of his uncle, Prince Czartoriski, to whom he had been paying a visit, the King drove into the trap prepared for him. His escort did not exceed some fifteen or sixteen grooms and troopers, and an aide-de-camp rode with him in his carriage.

Suddenly a number of well-armed men sprang out of the darkness, and surrounded both the carriage and its escort, ordering the coachman to pull up. Before he could obey a shower of bullets clattered about the vehicle, and struck down an equerry who had posted himself on the doorstep to defend his master. The escort had fled at the first shot; even the aide-de-camp was gone; the King was all alone. It was a pitch-dark night, and he attempted to profit by the darkness; but before he had taken half-a-dozen steps, a rough hand clutched hold of his hair. "We have you now," cried the man who had stopped him; "your hour is come!" and a pistol was discharged so close to his face that he afterwards said he could feel the heat of the flame. At the same time a sabre-stroke was aimed at his head, and cut through his hat and hair to his skull. Meanwhile the conspirators had remounted their horses; two of them seized his collar and dragged him on between them, while they rode at full gallop, five hundred paces through the streets of Warsaw.

The alarm had by this time been given in both the Palace and the city. The guards hastened to the scene of the outrage, but discovered only the King's hat, soaked in blood. It was at once concluded that he had been killed, and his dead body carried off by the murderers; the city was filled with all kinds of dreadful rumours.

The King was soon breathless and ex-

haunted with the cruel treatment to which he had been subjected. He was unable to stand, and his captors were obliged to mount him on horseback. They then proceeded at a still more rapid pace. On reaching the city gate they found it closed, so that the only means of escape was by leaping the ditch. They did not hesitate. The King was of course compelled to follow their example. He pushed his horse forward, but he fell in the middle. A second attempt, a second failure; and the poor animal broke his leg. Stanislaus was dragged out covered with mud and greatly disordered; another horse was provided, and the desperate ride resumed. But not before they had relieved him of all his valuables, leaving only his handkerchief and tablet. Even Lukowski shared in the plunder, snatching the ribbon of the King's black eagle, with the diamond cross attached to it.

Most of the conspirators now dispersed; no doubt in order to warn their chiefs of the captive's approach. Only seven remained, under the command of Kosinski. The night had grown so heavy that they had lost their bearings, and knew not where they were. Moreover, their horses were spent with fatigue, and would not budge a step further. The party were compelled to alight, and forced the King to do the same—though he had but one boot, the other having stuck in the mud of the city ditch.

For some time they continued to wander about the fields, unable to discover any regular road, or to get out of the neighbourhood of Warsaw. At length they remounted King Stanislaus, two of them holding him up in the saddle with their hands, while a third led the horse by the bridle. Thus they stumbled on, until the King, perceiving that they had struck into a path which led to a village called Burskow, warned them that some Russian soldiers were stationed there, who would probably attempt his rescue. Strange advice, you will say, for the King to have given to his abductors; but it was really dictated by consummate prudence. He was reasonably afraid that on seeing the Russian guard the conspirators might have killed him and taken to flight; whereas by informing them of the danger to which they were exposing themselves, he to some extent gained their confidence. And, as a matter of fact, thenceforward they treated him with greater lenity. Finding himself unable to endure any longer the painful

posture they had forced upon him, he begged them to provide him with a boot and another horse. To this they assented; and then resumed their journey over the pathless tracts, frequently retracing their course without knowing it, until they finally found themselves in the wood of Bielany, not more than a league from Warsaw.

Meanwhile the capital was a scene of consternation and perplexity. The guards were afraid that if they pressed the pursuit of the captors, the latter, in their rage, might put the King to death under cover of the darkness. On the other hand, by delaying, they gave them time to convey their victim to some secure retreat, whence it might not be possible to rescue him. At last, several nobles mounted their horses and followed up the traces of the conspirators until they reached the point where the King had crossed the ditch. There they picked up his pelisse, which the King had lost in the scuffle, and as it was blood-spotted and shot-torn, it confirmed them in their belief that the King was no more.

Stanislaus and his captors were still wandering in the wood of Bielany, when they were suddenly alarmed by the sounds of a Russian patrol. After holding a short conference together four of them disappeared, leaving Kosinski and two others with the King. A quarter of an hour later they came upon a second Russian guard, and the two men fled, so that the King was alone with Kosinski. Both had abandoned their horses and were on foot. Exhausted by all he had undergone, Stanislaus begged his guardian to halt and allow him a few minutes' repose. The Pole refused, and threatened him with his drawn sword, but at the same time told him they would find a vehicle waiting for them on the threshold of the wood. They continued their tramp until they found themselves at the gate of the Convent of Bielany. Kosinski was here so agitated by his thoughts that the King perceived his disorder, and having remarked that they had strayed from the road in quite a different direction, added: "I see that you do not know where to go. Let me seek shelter in the convent, and do you provide for your own safety." "No," replied Kosinski, "I have sworn."

They continued their journeyings until they arrived at Mariemont, a small palace belonging to the House of Saxony, which

is not more than half a league from Warsaw. Kosinski showed some satisfaction on finding out where he was; and the King having again asked for a few minutes' rest, he consented. While they reclined together on the ground, the King employed the brief interval in endeavouring to propitiate his conductor, and persuade him to assist, or at least permit, his escape. He represented to him the criminality of his conduct in undertaking to kill his Sovereign, and the invalidity of an oath taken for such a purpose. Kosinski listened attentively, and at last showed some signs of remorse. "But if," he said, "consenting to save your life, I reconduct you to Warsaw, what will be the consequence? I shall be arrested and put to death."

This reflection plunged him anew into uncertainty and embarrassment. "I give you my word," said the King, "that no ill shall befall you; but if you doubt the fulfilment of my promise, escape while there is yet time. I can find my way towards some place of safety, and I will certainly point out to any who might wish to pursue you a route directly opposite to that taken by you." Kosinski could no longer resist. Throwing himself at the King's feet he implored his forgiveness, and swore to protect him against every enemy, adding that he would trust wholly to his generosity. The King repeated his promise that no harm should come to him. Thinking it prudent not the less to gain some asylum without delay, and remembering that there was a miller's hard by, he immediately turned his steps in that direction. Kosinski knocked at the door. There was no reply. Then he broke a window-pane, and demanded that shelter should be given to a gentleman who had been ill-used by thieves; but the miller, thinking they were robbers, refused to open, and for more than half an hour persisted in the refusal. Eventually the King approached, and speaking through the broken casement, endeavoured to induce the miller to receive them. "If we were thieves," said he, "we could as easily have broken the whole window as a single pane." This pithy argument convinced the miller; he opened the door and received the King.

The latter immediately wrote in French the following note to General Couër, Colonel of his foot guards:

"By a kind of miracle I have escaped from my assassins, and am now at the little mill of Mariemont. Come as soon as may

be to convey me from here. I am wounded, but not badly."

The King experienced some difficulty in finding a messenger to take the billet to Warsaw; but at length succeeded. Without a minute's delay Couër repaired to the mill, followed by a detachment of guards. On arriving there he found the King sound asleep on the ground, covered by the miller's cloak. The reader can imagine all that ensued—the surprise of the miller and his family when they discovered whom they had treated with such scant courtesy; the delight of the King at the happy ending of his night of peril; the rejoicings in Warsaw when the citizens welcomed back their sovereign. All's well that ends well, and so ended this strange story of the Abduction of a King.

THROUGH THE RANKS.

By MRS. LEITH-ADAMS.

(MRS. R. S. DE COURCY LAFFAN.)

Author of "*Aunt Hepsy's Foundling*," "*My Land of Beulah*," "*Bonnie Kate*," "*The Peyton Romance*," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XX. WAITING FOR THE KNELL.

"AND now—you will not hold me back?"

Hubert Claverdon knew to what he had pledged himself when he promised blindfold. He looked fixedly at Alison as she stood before him, and the thought came over him—could he ever hold her back, when the impulse of an intense nature led her into this or that action? Another thought followed. Would he ever, however long Heaven granted them to walk through life together, wish to hold her back? Surely her impulse would always be high and holy—her deeds great and good.

He knew now to what he had pledged himself. A farewell interview with the condemned man before removal to Kilmainham, had shown Claverdon that his stock of strength was still small, his powers of endurance poor. Dr. Masters had said that it would be months before "Richard was himself again," and that care and rest, and a change to his native air, were things imperative.

After the manner of ailing men, Hubert had rebelled against these drastic opinions; but Alison would have her way. She held up a warning, imperious finger.

"If I be dear to some one else," she quoted; and after that there was nothing

more to be said. So it was settled they were all to go down to Forrestleigh, and Alison with them. There was, of course, no difficulty about a long furlough for Hubert; a privilege that Alison was proud to hear him speak of by its actual name, and not as going on leave.

The Colonel had thrown cold water upon the idea of the Rector buying his son out.

"If you do that," he said, "we cannot give him his commission, and that is what we wish to do. Our Quartermaster is about to retire upon his laurels, and then I shall recommend your son for the vacancy. After that—the world is wide, and he can do what he will. You can purchase him an exchange into some other corps if he wishes to stick to the service."

Well, in any case Hubert's promise must be kept. He must go to sunny Devon with his father and mother; but Alison must be left behind.

"It will be terrible for you—an awful ordeal, my darling—to be with that poor girl at such a time."

"It would be more terrible to me to be kept back. I cannot tell you how miserable I should be."

He saw that her words were indeed true: he realised that for the love of such a woman there was a price to pay.

"And you will go to Kilmainham—just you and she together?"

"Just she and I. We shall be together all the time—every hour, every moment, until all is over. Then I shall bring her back here to Father John. I will not let the old man go with us, because I think that it would kill him."

"And Norah is to see her lover?"

"Yes; once, and the two men, Coghlan and McMurdock; the Colonel has interceded for them."

Hubert Claverdon hid his face upon his arms.

"Oh, good Heaven!" he said, with a long-drawn breath like a sob, "it seems too high a price to pay for my poor faulty life. I would give all I have—except you—to save him."

Alison was afraid. When Mr. Milman told him, ever so gently, and with all delicate tact, that the sentence upon Deacon was death, Hubert had had a trying relapse. She dared not speak, but just laid her hand upon the dear, dark head; and in her touch was comfort and healing.

We are nearing the end of our story,

and to some the end may seem too sad; yet not altogether sad, I think, since we leave Alison fulfilling the highest and holiest task life can give to any one—the comforting and sustaining of the afflicted.

It is a shabby, sordid little room in which the two women wait for the tolling of the knell that shall tell of Harry Deacon's death. There is a poor little deal table in the middle of the room—a pitiful affair enough; and yet just now no altar gorgeously draped, and ablaze with lights, could be a more sacred thing. By this table the two women kneel, hand clasped in hand, with no barrier either of caste or creed between them. Everything is very silent. A bird sings sweetly in a cage somewhere across the paved yard into which the room looks. Alas for the poor colleen! The once lustrous eyes are dull and fixed—filled with an unspeakable fear. The prayer dies upon the lips, that are livid and drawn tightly over the white teeth. She clings to Alison as the drowning man to the rope.

Oh, the horror of it—the horror of it! Her darling boy—her Harry—now this moment alive, and strong in the strength of his young manhood; perhaps the next—swinging, a dead and lifeless thing, in a horrible pit.

The bird in the room across the yard sings jubilant, for a ray of sunlight has touched the gilded bars of his cage. Louder and louder, more joyous and more shrill, rises his cry, until, in one final outburst, it seems to rise into the very heart of ecstasy.

"It is the song of a pardoned soul," says Alison, speaking she knows not by what divine grace, and in that moment the knell sounds, with a horrible lingering between each note that shudders as it falls. A gleam like the flicker of madness lights up Norah's eyes, and she lifts her arms high towards heaven.

"They have killed him—killed him—killed him!" she shrieks, and her voice rises shrilly and more shrill.

Then, as the dull thud of the deep-voiced bell still beats the air, Alison catches her in her arms, and the two women, with smothered sobs, clasp each other close.

Do you say we end our story with a death-knell? Nay, for the echo of joy-bells is in the air; and in this strange and complex life of ours, do not the death-

knells and the joy-bells mingle—do not joy and sorrow, life and death, jostle one another?

L'ENVOI.

Years have passed, and brought many changes to the Hundred and Ninety-Third.

We will begin with Ensign Green. That gentleman's career in the service was cut short by a relative dying and leaving him a large estate and fortune. The duties of a landlord called him, and there was no other way than to obey. The night he dined with the mess as a guest—pathetic in a mufti suit of dress clothes—the farewell speech he made—bursting into bitter tears in the middle of it—these are written in the records of the regiment. Subsequently he presented a massive gold snuff-box to the mess, and it went by the name of "Green's snuff-box," a fact which is alluded to in another story, that tells of the doings of the Hundred and Ninety-Third.

Mention is also there made of his recitation of My name is Norval having left a reputation behind it. We do not gather that Mr. Blizzard's Dying Gladiator created a similar sensation. Blizzard was indeed a feeble creature, or looked upon as such; yet it is sometimes the feeble things of this life that confound the wise. Blizzard volunteered for active service in one of those miserable petty wars that often cost us, as a country, such valuable lives; he rescued a wounded man under fire, and just as he had laid his burden down in a place of safety, got shot through the body by a spent bullet. They carried Blizzard into the poor apology for a hospital where the wounded were cared for, and the surgeon in charge shook his head.

The injured man asked if the one he had rescued would live, and they said "Yes," and an orderly near added that the said man had a wife and kids at home; at which Blizzard turned his face to the canvas wall with a smile. Then, in the middle of the night, the sick started and turned in their beds; for a shrill voice rose in the silence. In his delirium the dying man was back in the old life—the life of Soldiers' Evenings, of song and step-dance, and this is what he sang:

There's one thing I can do,
Says I!
Get shot instead of you,
Says I!

"An' he done it, too," said an old soldier grimly. That was Blizzard's last

song and last word. So he wasn't such a very feeble creature, after all. When they heard his story the mess of the Hundred and Ninety-Third drank to his memory, all standing, and in silence—a fitting tribute.

And the doctor? Much the same; his hair growing more sparsely on the temples, thinner on the crown; but quite as full of energy as ever, and as busy organising Soldiers' Evenings. Dr. Musters is, however, a Surgeon-Major now, and his Amelia delights in being the wife of a field-officer. She also greatly prides herself upon the possession of a certain bracelet, which on festive occasions adorns her well-made, plump little arm. It has two hearts in diamonds on the clasp, and—rather reversing the order of things, perhaps, yet full of a charming significance—was given to her by Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Claverdon on their wedding-day. Perhaps presents of this kind were the fashion in the Hundred and Ninety-Third, for on the day that Eliza married Drummer Coghlan, a neat square box arrived at Major Henneker's, and from a round aperture in the front thereof looked forth a little frilled face, and Missy, screaming with delight, pulled forth poor Abednego and "spreaded" him on the spot, while every one gazed in admiration at a small silver collar round his neck, whereon was engraved the magic name: "Little Missy." But Missy could not forget good Eliza, and many a night the child cried herself to sleep, in spite of the fact that the square box stood on a chair by her bedside. Eliza, too, fretted for her nursing until she got a Little Missy of her own; and even then the conceit was somewhat taken out of her, for Missy, after regarding the infant intently, with her head on one side and her eyes gravely reflective, said, with solemn earnestness:

"Do you really think it is so much nicer than little Abednego? It 'pears to me a little tiresome that its little face should be so red, and the top of its head like Dr. Musters's."

At the time I am writing up to there was no Little Missy any more. There was a rather lanky girl, with two long plaits of golden hair hanging down her back, busy with her lesson-books, but not the Little Missy we have known. As time goes on she will be lanky no more; she will blossom into rare and peerless beauty; and maybe I shall one day tell the story of her joys and sorrows,

loves and pains. About three years after the sad death of Private Deacon, Major Henneker sold out and turned his sword into a plough-share, gliding with all the ease of a perfect man of the world into the position of a country gentleman. Verrinder had exchanged with one the Honourable Robert Dacre, gone to India and taken Elsie with him. Truly, as we go on in life, "the old order changeth, yielding place to new."

For our closing scene we find ourselves once more in Ireland; once more in the soft, sweet early summer, when the meadows are starred with blossoms, and the music of the woods is at its sweetest. We are at Kinsale, and the glint of the bright bay is seen through the trees, the trees that are the homes of countless cushats. How fair the clear expanse of water, kissing the pale faces of the forget-me-nots that grow right down to its edge! In other parts of the shore the rocks run sheer down into the bay, and in their steep sides are caverns where the sea-flowers, of many a tint and hue, open their delicate corollas in the bright water, gently moving their slender petals, as though they were asleep and dreaming. The road winds round the bay, and here is the turn where the mackerel boats come in of a morning, and the exquisitely tinted fish leap and struggle in the nets, until they look like imprisoned sunshine.

Winding with the road, and passing the square-towered church, we come to a plain, massive building, with high, narrow windows and great gates.

It is the Convent of our Lady of Mercy; and, in the parlour, where the Mother Superior and the nuns receive their rare visitors, a group is assembled, in which we cannot but take some interest. There is a tall, dark, soldierly-looking man, and a most winsome lady by his side. We cannot mistake Alison, though happiness has chased much of the pensiveness from her fair face, and she is more matronly in figure than of yore. Between these two, and by the mother's knee, stands a bonnie little fellow of three summers, dark-eyed like the father, but with all Alison's sweetness in his radiant smile.

On her knees before the child is a nun, one who goes by the name of Sister Norah. It is our own colleen—colleen no longer—her face chiselled and spiritualised by a life of discipline and self-forgetfulness, and yet with the old sadness in the dark grey eyes; the sadness that nature had somehow planted there to tell of a sorrowful life to come. The boy studied the beautiful face in the quaint and unfamiliar setting of the conventual veil, the face that looked at him so tenderly and with such wistful fondness.

"Kiss the lady, darling," said Alison, and the chubby baby mouth made itself into a rosebud, and touched the pale mouth of the nun. "Tell her your name, sweet," went on the mother. It was a great effort to speak plain enough, but the three-year-old tongue did its best.

"Harry Claverdon—daddy's de-ar little boy—an' mummie's too," he added, slipping his precious little hand into Alison's; then, with the quick sympathy of a child, he said: "Oh, mummie, de-ar, the pretty lady is crying!" and the two little loving arms went round Norah's neck, and she held him close and fast, biling her face against him, and saying softly, "Harry, Harry," so that at last he got half afraid, and Alison had to soothe and quiet him.

But do not think that Norah's life is all sadness. There is nothing morbid about her. She is young, and of a healthy frame; she may live to be as old as the Mother Superior, whose gentle face is all over tiny lines and wrinkles, and her hands like withered brown leaves.

"Sister Norah loves to be among the little ones in our schools—she is the best teacher we have," says this Lady Abbeas, as Hubert Claverdon and his wife are taking their leave, "and she wins all their hearts entirely."

She has evidently won little Harry's heart, for he strains back from his mother's hand to look at the sweet-faced nun, and finally wafts a kiss to her from the tips of his chubby fingers.

Life for Norah may be long; but she has work enough to do, and she is happy.

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